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COLLEGE ENGLISH.

Examination Bulletin No. 13 from the University of the State of New York, prepared by Richard Jones, Ph.D., deals with College Entrance English. Doctor Jones has obtained specimen examination papers from some thirty universities and colleges, together with numerous letters setting forth the views, or in some cases the lack of views, of many teachers of English as to what should be demanded of the young man who seeks entrance to a college course in the English Language and Literature. These letters and papers the Doctor has made the subject of his pamphlet, and he has treated them in a somewhat flippant manner, evidently striving to divert the stream of comment, controversy, and miscellaneous cackle that has flowed out of the report of the now famous Committee of Ten into wittier if not wider channels.

But unfortunately there is too little fun in the whole subject to afford much play for wit, though there is humor in the declaration of one of Doctor Jones' professors that the object of the study of language is the formation of character, and pathos in the disbelief of another in the efficacy of any examination at all.

Doctor Jones' fundamental proposition is, "How shall literature be taught?"—but it seems to be the object of his pamphlet to show that contradictory opinions prevail among the teachers with whom he has communicated, rather than to answer the question himself or to allow them to do so. He has labored so assiduously in search of this contradiction that he has made some of his contributors contradict themselves. Thus he gleefully quotes a portion of a letter from one of them which seems to place him at variance with a lecture previously delivered. But when we read the whole letter the seeming contradiction disappears. The professor in question stated clearly that the minute questions objected to by Doctor

Jones are few in number and only asked "to discover whether the student has done assigned work thoroughly or not." So far from abandoning the previous position, it is reiterated strongly, the writer declaring that he values "very slightly that method of instruction which crams our children's heads with facts about literature."

Doctor Jones and his pamphlet both strongly exemplify the fact that much time and talk have been wasted on the whole subject, and that if the people so engaged would stop talking and devote themselves to their work instead, some good might result. When we finish the pamphlet we find ourselves no better off than before, and we contemplate Doctor Jones' state of mind with considerable anxiety. He is evidently quite hopelessly mixed and we wonder if he is ever to emerge from the ruins of the palace of learning, which he has so recklessly pulled down upon himself, or whether like the blind Samson he is to perish miserably in the debris while Yale and Harvard and Podunk gape boastfully upon him with their mouths. For as already indicated we learn nothing from the collection of examination papers, and this is to be accounted for by the very simple fact that Doctor Jones does not understand them himself and has moreover gone about seeking the answer to his question in the wrong way. A right understanding of the data furnished him would have taught him that there is no contradiction as to the result aimed at in all the colleges, while there may be differences of opinion as to the best method of obtaining this result. The professor who requires interpretation of passages and the one who enquires about the meaning of "to come" are both working upon the same lines as those who ask for short essays on Portia and the author of "Silas Marner." All are endeavoring to discover whether they are dealing with callow minds unfamiliar with the art of expression or not. Assure one of them that the applicant can think consecutively and express his thoughts properly and that will be sufficient.

To learn how to use an instrument, to cultivate an ap-

preciation for the masterpieces which have been produced by that instrument, and to obtain some degree of familiarity with those masterpieces, is the task of the student of English.

This task begins when he leans to read and does not end before he is graduated from college. We cannot, therefore, look to the colleges for all of it, or indeed for the most important part of it. Here is where Doctor Jones and most of those who like him are exercising themselves about the subject make a great mistake. The improvement of the present manifestly bad condition of affairs rests far more upon the schools than upon the colleges, and upon the quality of the teaching in those schools, rather than upon any textbooks or systems edited and formulated by college professors.

It would be a strange thing indeed if the teachers of English, or for that matter of anything else, in all institutions of learning required or expected the same things of all their students. It would certainly indicate a lack of vitality in the whole educational system and a woeful absence of anything like intellectual advancement. Doctor Jones has, therefore, made no wonderful discovery nor has he unearthed anything radically wrong in that system. There are undoubtedly certain radical defects but they are not shown in Examination Bulletin No. 13.

The varying character of the examinations merely indicates different conceptions of the best way to discover whether a solid foundation has been laid for the same kind of superstructure. "What the colleges want," is a very simple question easily answered. How they expect to get it is quite another, and though the variety of Doctor Jones' correspondence may add a little spice to the discussion it will do very little toward solving the main problem which after all is, how shall students be prepared for a college course, and is, therefore, a problem of the schools.

Any teacher of such a course will tell Doctor Jones that when the student comes to him, the sole object of an exami-

nation is to discover whether the applicant can formulate in respectable English any respectable thoughts. There would scarcely be a difference of opinion upon this subject, and since this is true, the whole matter resolves itself into a question concerning the preparatory schools and not the colleges at all. The real question, how shall a boy be taught sufficiently and properly to enable him to appreciate a college course in English can be answered only by teachers of boys.

The primary object of a preparatory school is to teach boys to think. It is a defective system which aims at storing an immature mind with facts, whether these be facts in literature or geometry. The trouble with the teaching of English lies just here. It begins with the loathesome diagrams, and the dreary parsing with which the small boy is afflicted and it pursues him through the set rules of rhetoric to leave him at last floundering in the mire of callow criticism which is fed by the shallow stream of his appreciation.

Good English cannot be taught. It is to be cultivated. It is rarely acquired by a dissecting process which exposes the nerve, bone, and sinew of the compositions taken under consideration.

The prevailing method of teaching the classics is largely responsible for the difficulty young students have in attaining a good literary style or an adequate literary appreciation. When we add the fact that this method has of late been very generally applied to the teaching of English we have approached very near the true source of the trouble. It is far from the purpose of the present writer to decry the study of the classics, but it must be admitted that the "pigeon-English" translation, the mechanical memorizing of forms, the unmeaning acquirement of rules which must be to most pupils purely arbitrary and senseless, destroy any sense of consonance between thought and expression, and obscure reason. The pupil thus grows to regard language not as a living organism with thought as its soul, but as a spiritless mechanism. It calls into play his memory and, to a certain extent, his discriminating powers but his deduct-

ive and his appreciative faculties are atrophied. This method carried into the mother tongue results in total lack of appreciation of the spirit of a piece of English, and in the inability to think in words, of which the colleges complain. The callowness of reason which lies back of this is encouraged and not corrected by the sort of text-book teaching which prevails not only in the department of English but in all others as well. The deficiency so apparent in English is as real in all departments, though perhaps not so marked, and the fault to be corrected lies therefore in the whole system of preparatory education.

The root of this fault is not far to seek. It lies in a misconception of the true nature of education which is prevalent among teachers and laity alike. This misconception is the false notion that children are sent to school to learn things. It is engendered by the utilitarian spirit of the age, by the eagerness to reach tangible results which is characteristic of the American people and which scorns formative processes of long duration. Thus it is that far too many people have grown to regard education not as a developing but an acquiring process. These people do not inquire how well fitted a pupil is to know things, but how many things he does know. Teaching based on such lines has caused most small boys to regard the Commentaries of Cæsar merely as a sort of lurking place for a hideous verbal monstrosity called oblique discourse, while "Evangeline" is good material to chop up into quarter inch lengths. It has reduced the noble science of geometry to a set of algebraic formulae, and so rendered Plato's advice to would-be disciples utterly meaningless. Most young men cannot write because they cannot think. They cannot discuss literary master-pieces intelligently because they have not learned to appreciate them—they have been too busily engaged in learning other things. Their writing is "aimless and immethodical" because they themselves are so. This is not the fault of the teachers of English, because good English is a habit which must grow like other habits, and have its roots in use and wont.

To learn rules of use in the English class-room and constantly ignore them is of little avail. At home, at play, even in some class-rooms, this is too frequently done, and so all the soul being taken out of the rules they become the dead, dry, detestable matter they are to most young people.

So too, no sort of literary appreciation will ever result from cramming all the Editor's Notes in the numerous editions. This also must be the result of cultivation, and to form it is the hardest task of the teacher of English. What is needed is not talk but teaching—teaching of the kind that literally “leads out.” To demonstrate that college examinations differ or even to make them uniform will do very little good. To discuss anything, it must have been realized—grasped in completeness, as it were. So the teacher must induce inquiring rather than acquiring minds. The pupil must be directed in his reading and made to read much. If he cannot do this understandingly and appreciatively, it must be done for him. The dissecting process should not be begun until he realizes that he has something worthy of analysis. He must realize the whole, before he begins the discussion of parts. In order that he may do this, his thinking powers must have been to a certain extent developed and trained, and this task is far beyond the opportunities or even the power of the teacher of English.

Thus again we are brought up against the fact that the deficiency lies in the system of teaching rather than in any failure of instruction in the English department. The attempt to reduce the teaching of English to a system, to provide uniform text books, and treat them on the same lines will result in little good. Literature cannot be treated as so many propositions in algebra or geometry which can bear but one aspect or be susceptible of but one interpretation. It suggests as well as states. The student must be made to feel as well as know. His heart and mind must both be enlisted. When this is done his books become part of his growth, they are assimilated into his character.

He who does not himself feel, can rarely make others

feel, and hence it is that text-books and systems must play minor parts in the teaching of English literature. It is upon the teacher himself that the burden chiefly rests. If he does not enter upon his task with enthusiasm born of his own sympathy, he will fail to arouse any feeling, and therefore any appreciation in his pupils. No system can take the place of this enthusiasm. The acquiring of any amount of bare facts about authors and their works, or the rending of these latter into verbal fragments, no matter how carefully these fragments be gathered up and assorted into figures, tropes, balanced sentences, and such like technical baskets, will never produce the same result, and this result is "what the colleges want and what society needs."

All this is true of any language study, but it is especially true of English. All the Literary Circles, Teachers' Institutes, and Examination Symposia that can be held will never alter its truth or improve the existing state of affairs.

We may conclude, therefore, that the one thing needful is to build up the sacred office of teacher, to add to its character by emphasizing its inspiration, in short to realize that teachers are born, not made. Here is where the blind faith in systems has done most harm. It has invented a machine called the Normal School, which is expected to make of innumerable sows' ears innumerable silk purses all of the same pattern. Teachers are to be made in pretty much the same way that editions are made. Each one is armed with patterns and tape, and goes forth to cut adolescent minds into specified shape by specified rules. Small wonder that the raw material is most often cut bias, and that the result is but flimsy, though tawdry patchwork.

W. H. McKELLAR.